

Caring for Our Marriages – Working Out God’s Design in the Home

Introduction

Read Genesis 2:18-25

This passage is the beginnings of marriage—Genesis is the book of beginnings, and this is the beginning of the divine institution of marriage.

And yes, it is a DIVINE institution properly understood.

Marriage was *designed* by God, DEFINED by God, and therefore only God can properly make the rules and set the guidelines regarding marriage.

Why do the nations rage, and the peoples imagine such vain things as same-sex marriage ... by definition this is saying a same-sex union between opposite-sex people?

Marriage is a union between a man and a woman by definition.

He who sits in the heavens laughs at the oxymoron, and His plan and design for all the ages will not be thwarted by it.

But I digress ... which might be fun for a guy visiting for the first time ... I’ll just lob a few grenades this morning, and see how many of them John can jump on before they explode.

John has asked me to teach on the divine design for marriage, and I’ll not spend too much time addressing the misnomers and misrepresentations of it, except for those that might be leading us astray in our understanding or practice of God’s plan.

Anything called marriage, or relational unions, that are *more*, or *less*, or *different*, than what we see described here is a perversion of the divine institution of marriage...

...and those broken versions can NEVER produce the kind of joy, happiness, fulfillment, and pleasure God has designed marriage to be for those who understand and follow God’s design for it.

In the summer of 2014 a friend of mine, preaching at a local church in New England, had three people approach him after a church service—a man, and two women.

One of the women was pregnant, and the man introduced the *other* woman as his fiancé, and the pregnant woman as his fiancé’s best friend, ... *and the mother of his child*.

His girlfriend’s BFF wanted to have a baby, apparently, and when she told her friend, she thought, “well, my boyfriend is really cool; I think he would be a great dad; you should have his baby.”

And so they did.

The three of them lived together, as they related to him. But in recent weeks they were having trouble getting along, and in their relational difficulties someone thought, “Well, I hear that churches help people; we should go to a church and see if they can help us.”

So, they picked the closest one, and showed up on Sunday to ask for help.

My friend said to them,...

That is an interesting story, and this is kind of a unique arrangement. Maybe you have never heard this before, but the Bible says that God designed relationships, like marriage and parenting, to function a certain way. And when we follow the design and function of the Creator of people the hearts of man, these things work better. If you would be interested in sitting down and reading in the Bible how God designed marriage and families and relationships to work properly, I would be happy to spend some time with you.

It sounds kind of odd probably to most of us that anyone would be so far off in their thinking about how marriage and family should work, but this is the trend today—there will be more and more of this kind of confusion and dysfunction.

The recent issue of Christianity Today, in an article about polyamory—multiple intimate partners in various scenarios—reported that 70% of non-religious Americans between the ages of 24-35 believe there is nothing wrong with polyamory.

So, in a world of confusion and dysfunction, where God’s standards are unknown, redefined, or even rebelled against,...

...it is important that we go back to the book, God’s perfect law, the wise and kind expression of God’s will for mankind, and we take a look at what the beginnings of marriage teaches us about understand and pursuing married life in a way that pleases God.

MAIN IDEA: As the first marriage is established, God displays and describes FOUR PURSUITS of a God honoring marriage.

1. Couples must CULTIVATE COMPANIONSHIP (2:18a)

Look first at verse 18, where we are told exactly what sad condition marriage was given to solve.

Read 2:18.

Marriage was established to solve Adam’s problem of being ALONE.

I would clarify here too, that ALONE does not necessarily mean that marriage was designed by God to solve loneliness. There are many reasons why two are better than one, and while I use the word “companionship” here, I’m not restricting that concept to relational intimacy.

But here we see God’s commentary that Adam was ALONE, and that condition is the ONLY thing about God’s creation that He says was NOT GOOD!

Everything about creation is repeatedly said to be GOOD, good, good ... and then after He creates Eve, it is VERY GOOD. But here is says God saw something that was NOT GOOD.

Why was it not good for Adam to be alone?

Well, let's start with the first and most obvious point. Adam had been given some responsibilities by God in Genesis 1:27-28, which he could not fulfill on his own.

Namely, "be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth."

Given that duty, it was definitely not good that Adam was alone!

That is not the only reason though. I believe there was also an element of relational companionship that was needed in the human race if we are to properly reflect the relational nature of the God in whose image we have been created.

But also, ... as you read the commission given by God in Genesis 1:27-28, the text says they were created male and female, and God blessed THEM, and said to THEM ...

... fruitful filling, AND SUBDUING, and RULING over the earth is something they were given to do TOGETHER!

Knowing these responsibilities were coming, God knew that Adam could not fulfill these responsibilities alone, so He says, "It is not good" that Adam is alone—Adam can't do what God is going to tell him to do if he is alone.

So, there are at least three reasons, rooted in (1) responsibilities, (2) relationships, and (3) reproduction – filling the earth.

I think this is a beautiful picture, one that shows us that marriage is designed to be a total sharing of life together with another. And this sharing can be a joyful one. It was certainly **designed** to be a joyful one, prior to the fall.

This is another way God has allowed us to express our relational nature, to reflect His divine image, and to find companionship in the work He has given us to do.

Adam got a companion and a co-laborer in the work they were jointly called by God to do.

There have been definitions of marriage—the most familiar calling it a covenant of companionship—that has so emphasized the relational part of marriage, that it sometimes overshadows other aspects of marriage, or what it means to be a Christian first and a married person second.

Jesus, history's most famous single person, did not NEED marriage to image the relational nature of God, or to complete the work the Father gave Him to do.

But God in His grace has given a gift to mankind, of a kind of intimacy in marriage, and a co-laborer in our mission, that results in a oneness, a relational intimacy, that is so profound it is adequate to picture the spiritual union of Christ and His people—or so Paul says in Ephesians 5.

So, some have overemphasized the relational companionship, and it is also true that some in evangelicalism have underemphasized the co-laboring of marriage.

In fact, in a group this size, I would guess perhaps some of you might even be considering for the first time that Adam's headship, and Eve's helper title/status, were to be lived out in order

to accomplish, and in a WAY that would fulfill, a mission they had equal responsibility to carry out.

So let's ask the practical questions ...

Married couples, do you prize and value the privilege you have of enjoying the relational intimacy of marriage?

I'm not even thinking about the sexual relationship, though that is the most intimate part of marriage, and certainly something for you to enjoy, and pursue, and know about one another.

Do you know the color of your wife's eyes?

Macadamia nut Brown, or is it Carolina or Sapphire Blue?

Do you know your husband's favorite meal or flavor?

3-cheese, spicy sausage lasagna ... [cough, cough].

Can I suggest you simply make this a goal ... learn something new about your spouse every week—preferably something perhaps only you might know, but make it wide open.

Married couples, do you consider your work, and God-given responsibilities, something that you own and pursue together—whether it is family, or your vocation, or ministry at church?

There should be thoughtful and intentional pursuits and cooperation toward the same things—an obvious partnership is parenting for those blessed with children.

And even thoughtful and intentional (thankful and conscious) appreciation and effort toward cooperating in life...

- I would tell Michelle, the busier I am, the more freed up she would need to be

It is a companionship of affection, but also a companionship of cooperation—of being co-laborers, and joint-heirs of the grace of life, working together to fulfill God's calling in your life.

There is a place for leadership, headship and submission is part of biblical marriage. But even that I think is often misunderstood and misapplied, and the result is often that this principle of co-laboring is overshadowed and ignored.

Now, there are some other thoughts I have for the singles ...

Single adults, do you appreciate that you can reflect the relational image of God in your singleness—like Jesus did?

Are you thankful that you can focus on what God has called you to be and do, with undistracted devotion to Christ?

While the relational and co-laboring aspects of marriage are to be fulfilled and enjoyed by those who have them, they are by no means necessary for you to be a joyful, fulfilled, productive servant of Christ and His kingdom. Don't lose sight of that.

But, for those who are married, you must ...

... Couples must CULTIVATE COMPANIONSHIP (2:18a)

You can't fulfill God's purpose for your marriage if you are not pursuing intimacy, companionship, and cooperation with your spouse.

Look at 2:24 - ...they shall become one flesh.

Read 2:24.

They shall become one flesh...the manner which God used to create Eve, taking a chunk from Adam's side, and forming it into the woman, is forever a picture of how intimate the marriage relationship is intended to be.

One flesh is not *primarily* a statement about physical intimacy, or even about the man and woman reproducing and creating a new human being, one person out of their collectively joined DNA.

Being one flesh is primarily about being one in spirit, thought, mind and purpose—it is about the joining together of two PERSONS in harmony and intimacy.

It is about being best of friends, and perfect companions, and knowing each others desires and passions and longings and weaknesses and strengths.

It is about companionship and partnership—two people working together toward complete ONENESS!

I like the way Wayne Mack puts it: "Marriage is a total commitment and a total sharing of the total person with another until death."

Being one flesh means sharing everything...your bodies, your possessions, your ideas, your feelings, your abilities, your gifts, your successes, your failures, your sufferings, your joys, your delights, your desires, your goals.

It is total oneness...one flesh...as in becoming one entity!

Couples must CULTIVATE COMPANIONSHIP (2:18a)

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Couples must CULTIVATE COMPANIONSHIP (2:18a)

2. Wives must COMPLEMENT their husband's SERVICE to God (2:18b)

Here in 2:18, we have the first, and most basic statement in Scripture, that there is a functional order within the marriage relationship.

In other words, while both man and woman are created in the image and likeness of God, and while they equally share in the responsibility to rule over and subdue the earth, there is a functional order of husbands exercising godly headship, and wives joyously helping their husbands in this task.

What does this particular phrase mean, "*I will make him a helper suitable for him,*" and what are the implications for our marriages and responsibilities.

You'll notice how I have worded the wife's responsibility.

Wives must COMPLEMENT their husband's SERVICE to God.

That's "complement," not "compliment."

This isn't saying "good job, honey" or, "you look very handsome in that cowboy hat."

It means to be the complement, or the part that completes something. Peanut Butter and jelly would be a trite example.

A complement is something that completes the other half.

Like a sporty convertible is the perfect complement to a week at a luxury beach resort—it just makes it that much better.

God said that man needed a helper, someone to help get the job done, and one that would be the perfect complement, completer, in fulfilling the responsibilities God had given the human race to fulfill.

Now when we see this word helper, we have a tendency to think of it as a demeaning term—as someone who does the dirty work. We have leaders and we have helpers—

...but this is not the idea wrapped up in this Hebrew term helper.

In fact, do you know who is called the "helper" most often in Scripture? God Himself!

Psalm 30:10 – "Hear, O LORD, and be gracious to me; O LORD, be my helper."

Psalm 54:4 – Behold, God is my helper; The Lord is the sustainer of my soul.

Job calls himself a helper of the poor.

Job 29:12 – Because I delivered the poor who cried for help, And the orphan who had no helper.

God is also called the helper of the poor, the oppressed, the widow and the orphan. This gives us an idea of what a helper truly is.

A helper in the biblical sense of the term is someone who comes alongside someone who is needy or inadequate by themselves and provides what they need.

Woman is the helper that corresponds to the man.

This word 'suitable' means "corresponding to," and gives the idea of "this is the perfect helper match for his needs."

Man alone was (and is) inadequate to reproduce and rule over the earth. God provided the perfect companion and helper to meet the need—and this divine provision has continued on for the race of mankind ever since.

Within the relationship of marriage, which God has designed there is still a functional difference, with the husband being the head, the leader, and the wife being the helper, the suitable complement, who provides what is needed to make the partnership work.

Man and woman work together perfectly to accomplish God's purposes for them—they work together, and they are equals regarding their existence in the image of God, meaning their standing before God, and their privilege and ability to relate to God and to serve Him.

I believe the equality of image-bearing, and the partnership of our joint responsibilities to subdue the earth *has been overshadowed (and sometimes minimized and ignored)*.

And that is likely a natural swing in the pendulum of understanding difficult issues like this, reflecting a reaction (maybe an OVER-reaction) to the cultural feminism that has dominated our society over the last 50+ years.

I'm not going to take the time to clarify how the proper roles of husband and wife find their grounds in creation, and the details even of this text. You can read the Apostle Paul's explanation of it in 1 Corinthians 11 if you would like some homework.

What is highlighted here is NOT submission, but the equality of essence, and the partnership of calling. That partnership is reflected in what is a clear delineation of roles—the husband leading and the woman being the necessary and suitable helper.

And that is why I've worded the essence of this principle as...

Wives must COMPLEMENT their husband's SERVICE to God.

Again, however, the relationship as God describes and defines here, makes it perfectly clear that whatever is meant by headship and submission, it has NOTHING to do with a person's essence or ability.

I think submission is often discussed too much, and that godly leadership is discussed too little in the church today.

There is an interesting detail in virtually EVERY definition of submission I've ever seen in a trustworthy source.

Good definitions of submission always include the word "willing."

Biblical submission is a *willing* deference to a husband's leadership. It is *willingly* bringing yourself under the authority of another.

As soon as that authority or leadership is demanding, or controlling, then the response to it is no longer willing deference. It is not a proper biblical headship in that case either, it is now subjugation or maybe even oppression.

This might challenge some categories for you here, but I often hear it said, "As long as your husband isn't asking you to sin or disobey Scripture, then a submissive wife will do what he asks."

I suppose in principle, I might agree with that, as long as the husband's mindset, approach, and attitude of headship is a godly, sacrificial, nurturing, cherishing, servant-minded, "consider others more important," kind of leadership.

More on that later, under the next point...

...but I would say there are some who practice a kind of headship in the home, that is NOT characterized by those things, and it is not a biblical, godly, Christlike headship at all.

I call it “hyper-headship,” and it is really subjugation and oppression. And God’s instructions for how to respond to oppression involves exposing it through humble confrontation.

Hmmmm.... That is practically very different than “as long as he doesn’t ask you to sin, you should submit.”

Again, I think that principle works terrific, if both members of the marriage are seeking to fulfill their role biblically.

So what does that look like?

That is our third ...

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3. Husbands must EXERCISE their proper HEADSHIP (2:19-24)

The Bible makes it perfectly clear, that headship is not some kind of absolute authority, an authority that justifies chauvinistic or oppressive treatment of women—that is a perversion of the divine order.

Headship in the home is a DELEGATED authority (and I’m not sure that *authority* is the best word here).

As a DELEGATED authority, it must be exercised under the ultimate authority, lordship, and regulations of the higher authority who granted it.

What does authority exercised under the Lordship of Christ look like?

- It is an authority that is to be exercised recognizing that wives are precious,...
- ...that leadership and headship comes with responsibilities,...
- ...that is humbled by the fact that husbands need a helper to be excellent in the way they fulfill their responsibilities before God,...
- ...and that this helper is also supposed to be an intimate, one-flesh, companion.

Where do we see these ideas fleshed out in Scripture?

Let’s look at what Jesus said about authority – Matt 20:24-28.

In a context where two of his disciples were using their mother to gain an advantage and were seeking ambitiously to have a little extra authority in the kingdom...

The other disciples weren’t too happy with the attempted power play—but Jesus uses it as a teaching moment.

Read Matthew 20:24-28.

Our leadership, in every way and in every place, must look different than the world's.

Leadership that (and that includes headship in the home) that has a decidedly and identifiable “top down” kind of control—Jesus says “lording over,” or this term “exercise authority” is probably better rendered “use power against someone” ...

... that is not Christian authority structure!

“It is not that way among you!”

What is it supposed to look like?

Ephesians 5:25–33 — **25** Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, **26** that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, **27** so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. **28** In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. **29** For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, **30** because we are members of his body. **31** ***“Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.”*** **32** This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. **33** However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

This is what godly headship looks like. It is sacrificial, it is servant-hearted, it seeks to put your wife's splendor on display, it nourishes and cherishes.

This kind of leading in Christian homes doesn't leave room for being passive ...

... but it doesn't leave room for being authoritarian either.

“It is not that way among you!”

The “submit if he isn't asking you to sin” principle works ONLY IF, the husband is this kind of leader.

Otherwise, it very easily turns into authoritarian rule in the house—if not oppression or subjugation.

The conservative evangelical church—and even the complementarian circles we all run in—must be honest and admit that there have been instances where principles of headship and submission have been used to justify and empower controlling and authoritarian men.

“It is NOT [to be] that way among you!” Jesus said ...

And Ephesians 5 paints a such a rich picture of what loving, Christ-like, sacrificial, nourishing and cherishing of our wives ought to look like.

And Paul quotes Genesis 2—our text this morning—to make sure that we understand that this is, and always has been, God's design for marriage.

What is also clear, is that our culture (the world, ruled and shaped by sin), does not do manhood very well.

We either have an over-charged macho view of manhood.

Or we have the satire of the passive, buffoon of a husband and father—Homer Simpson, or Tim “the tool man” Taylor.

Instead, we ought to look at Jesus for the model of manhood.

Now, granted, we don’t get glimpses into what a “married Jesus” would look and act like—not in the form we might prefer.

But manhood, character, virtue—these things look the same in any relationship.

And, we also know the sacrificial, servant-hearted, nourishing and cherishing of Jesus from the perspective of His bride.

I know what it is like to nourish and cherish, because I myself have been nourished and cherished by Christ.

It’s not complicated, actually.

Galatians 5:22–23 — 22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, **23** gentleness, self-control; ~~against such things there is no law.~~

This is what Christlike headship in the home will look like.

On a practical level—READY FOR A SURPRISE—godly headship in the home looks like Proverbs 31.

We don’t see or hear about the man so much in Proverbs 31—other than he is fed well, clothed well, and has a great reputation because of his wife ...

... but whoever that guy was, he had figured out how to enable, encourage, and empower his wife to be the total package.

She was productive, and joyful, and flourishing in every way!

And godly headship will enable, encourage, and empower the joyful, productive, flourishing of one’s wife.

PRACTICALLY ...

What are your wife’s dreams, gifts, talents, desires? They probably center around the home and family, but perhaps some things that she desires to pursue outside of that.

In what ways do you intentionally express and show your wife that she is precious to you?

How are you deliberately nourishing and cherishing your wife?

Are you as consistent and deliberate about that pursuit as you are consistent and deliberate about loving your own body—the one you clean, and clothe, and feed every day?

... He who loves his wife, love himself ...

... no one ever hated his own flesh ...

Or maybe we could keep it even simpler: the greatest commandment is love, right? That means a lot of things, but in marriage it certainly doesn't mean anything less than cultivating an atmosphere of mutual affection and sacrificial service.

And husbands, your role as a leader, the head of your home, is to be the lead lover, the affectionate tone-setter, and the servant of all.

Now, one last point, just to give our broad overview of the beginnings of marriage a little icing on the cake.

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4. Couples should SELFLESSLY enjoy INTIMACY (2:25)

After constituting the first marriage, by fashioning Eve from the rib of Adam, and declaring the one-flesh nature of marriage ...

God describes what their sinless, shameless, first day was like.

Read Genesis 2:25.

Sin will introduce the shame very soon, but at first ...

As soon as they eat the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they immediately want to cover their nakedness. A shame previously unknown to them is now introduced into their perfectly harmonious existence together.

When Adam and Eve were first created, prior to the entrance of sin into the world, they experienced a perfectly pleasurable and selfless marital intimacy.

That was first and foremost a relational, affectionate, selfless interest in the other—that oneness relationally.

But the reference to nakedness certainly implies that there was also a physical intimacy that was untainted by sin.

Imagine a marital relationship where nothing was ever done for selfish pleasure...where both husband and wife were interested in one another, not for what they could get out of it, but for what the other person would enjoy...

...And where nothing hindered the pursuit of this mutual satisfaction and pleasure.

This was the kind of relationship that Adam and Eve enjoyed.

Sin has corrupted every aspect of the marital relationship, including the physical relationship.

But between Adam and Eve there was no shame, no selfishness, no embarrassed self-consciousness, no reluctance, ... just the selfless, shameless pursuit of pleasing the other person, without reason for shame.

Why does God put this here?

I believe He knows that this is one area where married couples will inevitably see the selfishness of their own hearts.

Whether you see that selfishness in trying to get what only pleases you, or whether that selfishness is seen by not really wanting to please your spouse,...

...whatever and however it rears its head, sin has corrupted even this most precious, and enjoyable divine gift of marriage.

God doesn't go into a lot of detail, and I think this reflects that the physical relationship is only one aspect of marriage, and certainly isn't to be the aspect to be overemphasized at the expense of others.

If a couple is pursuing companionship, and the one-flesh relationship God has designed, most of the time they will also be learning how to selflessly enjoy intimacy with one another.

This is part of God's ideal.

This is part of God's model married home, if you will.

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